

# THE MIDLAND

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

---

---

VOL. XI

JUNE 15, 1925

NO. 12

---

---

## POEMS

By GRACE STONE COATES

### EAGLES AND CAT-BIRDS

I, John Auerbach, of Iowa and Montana,  
Have killed Indians, and watched buffalo  
Drift with the wind; and have rounded stage-horses  
Into the storm, when their bellies raked the snow.

I have seen cattle crowded back from the ranges,  
Ten thousand nibbling sheep taking their place;  
Have lain all night at a head-gate in dry season,  
Guarding my rights, with a gun-stock along my face.

My wife was lonely for her people in Iowa.  
She couldn't be sheriff, and ride at a posse's head —  
She could only darken the windows, fingering the curtains,  
Wiping her eyes; and whimper I'd come back dead!

I, of Montana, living now in Iowa,  
Remember eagles screaming above the hills;  
I, who have heard Sun River thunder out of its gorges,  
Will die where corn rustles and a tedious cat-bird trills.

## THE CLIFF

Peace has left my heart,  
Driven by dull chatter  
On dingy street  
To a place apart;  
But I know where she is hiding.  
There's a cliff where pines are riding  
And exultant winds confiding  
Strange intentions of their own.

I shall make my way alone  
Past the green alfalfa tillage  
At the far end of the village;  
Skirt the coulee, dropping down  
Till the rounded knolls behind me  
Hide the chimneys of the town  
With their small insistency,  
And no curious eye can find me.  
Only then shall I be free  
For the prairie and the foothills  
And the cliff that summons me.

Free! To run, and free to loiter,  
Free to follow out of sight  
Startled rabbits' headlong dash  
And the screaming curlews' flight  
As they wheel and reconnoiter  
And protestingly retreat.

I shall climb the lichened boulders,  
Studying red and black and orange  
Mantling their aggressive shoulders;  
Leaning on their warmth to trace  
Lovely gray-green lichen lace  
Edging every scarlet splash;

Throw myself full length to drink  
Icy, bubbling springs that wink  
From the shaley hill.

Leading upward from the rill  
Is a deer-trail hunters follow,  
That winds high above a hollow  
Where the bluebells are a lake.  
One quick, stinging breath I take,  
Coming near.  
I shall stand there long, and gaze,  
And go softer on my ways  
From that passion of blue flame.  
Once so quietly I came  
That I glimpsed a wary deer  
Marshalling her baby fawn —  
They were there — and they were gone!

I shall climb the steepening ledge  
With its fern and cedar scent  
Into timber; almost blind  
To the painted cups and lovage  
For the bluebells in my mind!

On the cliff's sheer eastern edge,  
With the valley wide below it,  
Stands a tree that loves the granite  
And the cloud-sweep and the wind.  
Its grim roots to me are kind.  
I shall sit so quietly  
Chipmunks will think I do not matter,  
Scampering like mad across my feet.  
I shall neither feel nor think,  
Nor with teasing values reckon;  
If I sleep I shall not know it.  
I shall rest, and cease to be

All that people know of me —  
Idly glad of gay boletus,  
Netted curious underneath,  
Of the drifting vapor-wreath,  
And the pine cones' deadened patter  
On the needles and detritus.

If shy orioles reappear,  
Partridges resume their drumming,  
Glowing cedar-birds flash free,  
I shall smile, for Peace is near,  
But I shall not look or beckon  
Or entreat her swifter coming.

When the wind has hushed its story  
And the rounded moon swims pale  
To confound the western glory —  
When her mysteries prevail  
And squirrels quit their firs,  
And haunted birds fall dumb,  
Peace will know that I am hers;  
Peace will touch my breast, and whisper,  
"Come!"

### THE FREIGHTER

The old freighter writes:

"I want to visit you before I die;  
To see Montana once, and then cash in.  
Think, girl, what it will mean  
To slip along the old ways in a Ford  
Where once I swung high on the hurricane deck  
Of a ten-mule outfit — lead wagon and two trailers!  
I'll know the land. They tell me that I won't,  
But hills don't change."

(All plowed. Where antelope raised their heads  
 To look, cheap "nesters" squabble over fences.)  
 "You don't have good jerked buffalo meat, I s'pose?"  
 (Beef. From Chicago.)  
 "Or moccasins? I've made high moccasins,  
 Dipped 'em in water. Frozen 'em. They're warm."  
 (Tom Mix boots — and cut-out monstrosities  
 For ankles over-fat.)  
 "I know the trails from Custer west to Owen."  
 (Thickets and river-banks — there  
 Where Indian campfires made no thread of smoke —  
 Tourists defile with litter and tin cans.)

"To see the West once more — "

If I can keep  
 His eyes intent on mine, and ask for tales,  
 He may see only the old scenes again,  
 And never learn  
 That he has come "home" to an alien land.

### STRANGERS

One  
 beyond seas  
 presses my side.  
 I walk by yours  
 remote.

Beyond time and space  
 I am companioned  
 who dwell  
 a stranger in your house.

When I speak,  
 when you answer,  
 then I know  
 that we have never met.

A CHILD  
TASTES  
THE LOVELINESS  
OF LIFE  
AND FASHIONS  
A NEW DREAM

I

*A child*

When I am grown I shall eat citron,  
I shall stroke the cactus blossoms,  
I shall walk in the rain without a hat.

II

*tastes*

Translucent yellow-green,  
Persia you are, and warmth of Sicily;  
Citron, shall I ever know your land?  
Your thorny branches sparse on Kasha's  
hills —  
Their creamy inner blossoms?  
Your shadows remember their purple  
veining;  
Your green is green of the sea;  
Your gold is sunshine strained through  
pale leaves.  
I nibble your flaking crystal coat.  
Its fragrance is of other lands.

Citron, your taste is heavy on my tongue,  
Heavy and cloying!  
It weighs me with mysteries that are not  
mine.

## III

*the  
loveliness*

Here, here at my feet!  
Thirsty desert loveliness  
Drinking the sun!  
Delicate petals of honey pallor,  
Delicate, yet sufficient,  
Tenuous petals of shimmering luster  
Amorous of the sun!  
Your depths I explore, with wary, inquisi-  
tive finger;  
Their green is amber in the light.  
Your stamens are splashed wide,  
The bees have found them;  
Your pistil is heavy for the bee.

Cactus! Your spines lash and stab!  
I am stung by a million implacable  
needles!

## IV

*of life*

The rain is playing with the sun.  
It whispers jests to my hair,  
It teases my ears with secrets.  
I turn my face, I lift my arms to the rain.  
My bosom is drenched in its peace,  
I run in its heavy abundance.  
The sun thrusts at my eyes with golden  
splinters,  
The earth is swimming green.

The sun is tired  
He has forgotten us  
The wind has risen  
I have come too far  
I am cold.

## V

*and fashions* "Mother, I have made a citron cake;  
I have picked the pansies;  
I have caught rain-water to wash my  
hair."

## VI

*a new dream* (And he will take me to Persia . . .  
and to Italy —  
The gayest places . . .  
We dine;  
The sables slide from my indolent shoulders  
And my jewels are frosty stars  
As I turn my head  
Appraising a pale chartreuse!)

## LONELINESS

I am never lonely when you are gone;  
Then you are all mine, perfect, like laughter or dawn.  
Only when you are far away, being near,  
Loneliness drains my heart, and chills it with fear.

---

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

GRACE STONE COATES is a native of Kansas now living at Martinsdale, Montana. She writes, she says, "because a Montana hamlet offers exceptional opportunities for reflecting upon the universe!"



